



A Matter of Family: A Cousin's Lament

Gloria Marie Kingsnorth

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A Matter of Family: A Cousin's Lament is a memoir of author Gloria Marie Kingsnorth's fictional self, written in letter form to her alleged cousin, billionaire Grant Wilson Billings. The author's writing keeps the reader enthralled. Her narrative bends and refracts the black and white of her protagonist's life into ambiguous gray.

In the beginning of *A Matter of Family*, it is easy to forget that the book is fiction. Empathy quickly develops for the character, and readers will likely feel moral outrage toward her atrocious experiences. Kingsnorth's story sucks readers into the maelstrom of the protagonist's life. Black-and-white photographs of the fictional Kingsnorth family members add a creepy authenticity. Motifs similar to those found in the work of Edgar Allen Poe, like incest, murder, and insanity, are expertly infused in this modern Gothic.

The protagonist tells of her terrible childhood growing up in a large, impoverished, dysfunctional Canadian family: "The following is years of wanting to say something to you, but not knowing how to say it," she writes. "After all, what does a person say to a blood relative as wealthy and world famous as you are? The following is what I know to be true ... my perspective, a piece of my mind and memory." The maintained conversational tone of her 650-page epistle makes it a quick read.

The letter continues with the history of her kin and stories about the terrible ordeals she endured over her lifetime. She experienced unimaginable abuse and trauma, such as being rented out by her father to child pornographers, molested by family and strangers, and raped by various men. She also encountered and escaped the clutches of a serial killer.

As the letter/memoir progresses, the horrible things that happen to the author's fictitious self become more far-fetched. Her outrageous accusations against Billings sound like symptoms of paranoid schizophrenia. The fictional Kingsnorth believes that Grant was adopted by another family after he was born from her paternal uncle's possible rape of a neighborhood girl. She claims that Billings, his adopted family, and his employees have always conspired against her and her kin.

She writes, "What kind of man does everything in his power that he can to intimidate and discredit his biological cousin and make her feel paranoid by the use of his thousands of minions who covertly stalk her and her family members ... were you deliberately trying to make me think I was going crazy?" Kingsnorth the author manipulates the reader into strongly identifying with the fictional Kingsnorth. She then puts them into the disturbing throes of her character's mental illness; the reader's mind will likely slip a little as well.

On the surface, *A Matter of Family* appears to be a letter from a woman to her cousin about the history of their family. It is enriched with descriptions of eccentric and downright scary characters. Later, the fictional Kingsnorth descends into insanity, seeking reassurance for her paranoia and finding it from fortune tellers and psychics. All the while, she believes that everyone is out to get her.

Readers who like Anne Bronte's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and Lionel Shriver's *We Need to Talk About Kevin* will enjoy *A Matter of Family*.

LEE GOODEN (May 30, 2013)

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